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Henry Porter on the triumph of trivia

Decline of the intellectual

G2 with European weather



OnLine

France edges towards the 'pernicious' Net

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Screen

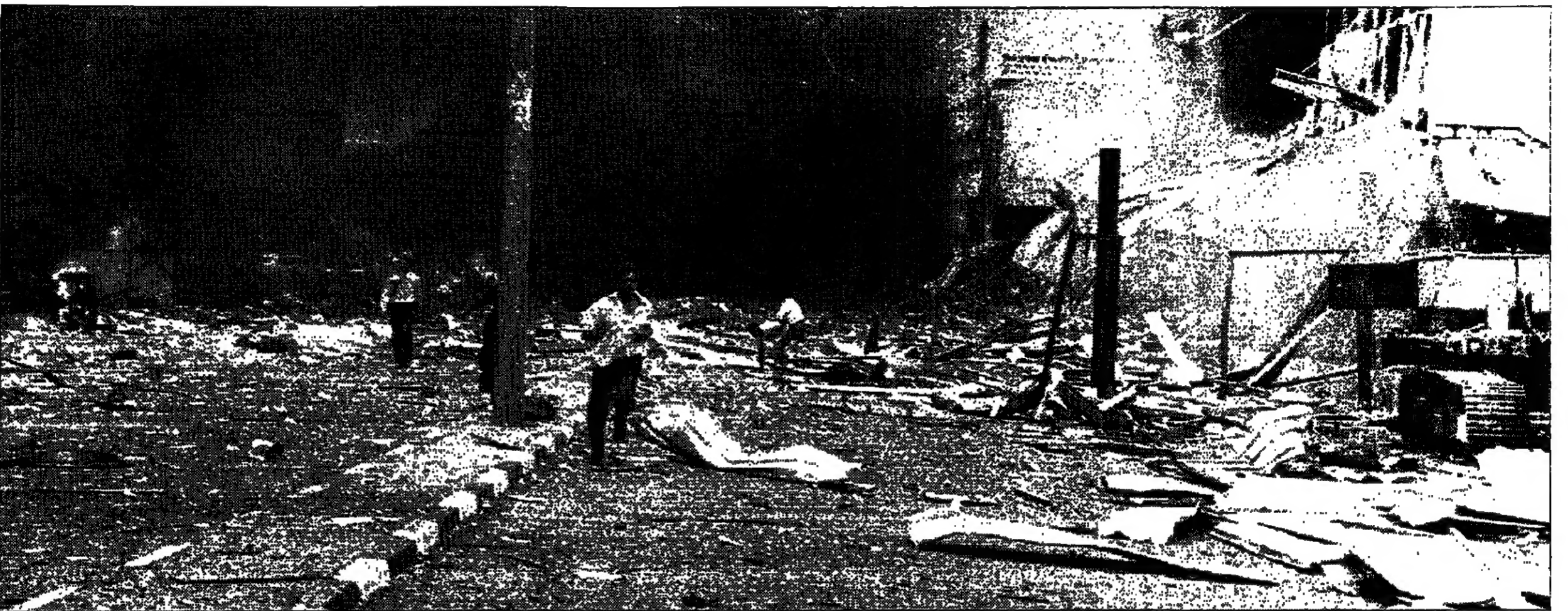
The triumphant return of Jean-Paul Belmondo

G2 page 8



Tamil separatists blamed for devastating retaliation against army gains

Tiger massacre in Colombo



Dazed workers flee the scene of yesterday's devastating bomb attack in one of the most heavily guarded districts of Colombo

PHOTOGRAPH ANURUDHRA LONDHPAPARACHCHI

Suzanne Goldenberg, and Mohan Samarasinghe of Reuters in Colombo

SRI LANKA paid in blood yesterday for its victories over the Tamil Tiger guerrillas as a devastating truck bomb gutted 10 buildings in the heart of Colombo, killing at least 55 people and wounding about 1,400 others.

Although Tiger officials at their offices in London disclaimed knowledge of the blast, government officials in the Sri Lankan capital said the suicide bomb — which follows the capture in December of the rebel Jaffna peninsula — bore the guerrillas' hallmark.

"It has to be [the Tamil Tigers]," Brigadier Sarath Munasinghe, the military's spokesman, said. "Who else would have done a thing like this?"

Doctors at Colombo's general hospital said 55 people were killed outright in the suicide attack, but one private radio station put the death toll at 91. More than 100 of those admitted to hospital were seriously injured.

The health minister, A.H.M. Fowzie, told reporters "I believe the death toll could rise as there are still many bodies trapped in the rubble."

The governor of the central bank, A.S. Jayewardene, said on television that 40 of its employees died in the blast — the most powerful in a 12-year war that no longer knows limits — oc-

Colombo bomb

A lorry packed with explosives blew up in front of the Central Bank in Colombo at 10.45am local time (05.15 GMT) yesterday. It killed some 55 people and wounded over 1,000.

The explosion occurred on a busy morning outside the central bank in Colombo's financial district. A military official said three people jumped from a moving



truck and began firing at random. The truck — believed to be carrying about 400lb of explosives — careered into a gate at the bank's entrance.

Witnesses described a scene that looked like the aftermath of an earthquake, with an 8ft crater at its centre.

"It was like a dozen Towering Infernos," said a local journalist.

Other banks and commercial establishments were wrecked, and all the vehicles in a multi-storey car park destroyed. Newspaper kiosks vanished in the explosion, which occurred at about 10.45am local time and was felt up to three miles away.

Massive clouds of black smoke and flame spewed from nearby office blocks as hundreds of dazed and wounded people fled.

Witnesses said windows and ceilings came crashing

down, lifts plummeted to the ground and gaping holes were punched in walls.

The wounded clung for support to walls and railings, which quickly became red with blood.

Helicopters dropped water to douse the fires, while firemen rescued stranded office workers from roofs.

Yesterday's blast occurred in one of the most highly guarded areas in the capital — already a city under siege. The presidential secretariat, the foreign ministry and naval headquarters are just a few hundred yards away.

Two nearby hotels were severely damaged in the blast, and several tourists were reportedly injured, babying government claims that the island is again safe.

There had already been

fears for the safety of the Australian cricket team, who are due to play Sri Lanka in Colombo in their opening World Cup match on February 17. They are considering forfeiting the game. Their coach Bobby Simpson asked: "Who wants to be around when bombs are going off?"

In Colombo only the strip of coastal road fronting the residence of President Chandrika Kumaratunga is more heavily guarded than the district hit yesterday. In the last six months, President Kumaratunga has rarely strayed from the compound, and the blast

underscores her vulnerability. The suicide bomb is certain to affect the government's efforts to win support from the majority Sinhalese community for peace proposals aimed at ending the war.

It is already clear that the Sri Lankan authorities can no longer protect the country's capital, even while the military has been mopping up the remaining pockets under Tiger control in the east.

Two weeks ago, the government put its peace policies to a referendum.

Turn to page 2, column 7

MPs under fire for pay claim

Michael White Political Editor

THE latest backbench campaign to raise MPs' pay backfired last night amid furious denunciations of political insensitivity from poverty lobbyists and disaffected voters. Downing Street reacted warily to the motion, signed by nearly 300 of the 651 sitting MPs. To refer the hyper-sensitive issue of their own and ministerial pay to Lord Nolan's committee on standards in public life.

So did a seemingly-reluctant Lord Nolan, whose terms of reference would have to be revised should John Major endorse the move. The hot potato could alternatively be passed to the Senior Salaries Review Body, an option being canvassed by some ministers.

The row re-opened the issue of outside work done by some MPs. Unions said it was astounding that while workers' pay was going down, MPs were trying to raise their own salaries, and poverty campaigners, angry at years of ever-lower wages for the unskilled, protested that MPs were trying to cocoon themselves from reality. Voters in-

terviewed for radio and television were equally dismissive.

What prompted spontaneous grassroots anger was the way the motion was presented as a demand for a near-doubling of the current £24,085 a year, a claim being privately advanced mainly by Tories feeling the post-Nolan squeeze on outside earnings.

Tony Blair and Paddy Ashdown both stressed the importance of having an independent mechanism for indexing MPs' pay to an outside group.

But the Liberal Democrat leader said that he was happy with the present level, while Mr Blair's office said: "Higher pay for MPs is not a priority for an incoming Labour government."

The Leader of the Commons, Tony Newton, has been quietly investigating ways of sparing MPs the embarrassment of having an annual battle with the Government. Allowing for inflation, MPs pay has been static in post-war inflation terms for 30 years while average pay has risen by 80 per cent. Sir Terence Higgins, spokesman for the campaign, stressed.

Leader comment, page 8

Share payout for millions after building society joins the bank wagon

Margaret Hughes Personal Finance Editor

MORE THAN 34 million people are expected to get an average of £1,000 each after the Alliance & Leicester building society announced its stock market flotation yesterday.

Months of speculation, which forced it to close its doors to new members, ended when Britain's fourth largest building society, with assets of £28 billion, decided to convert to being a bank as quickly as possible.

But the tens of thousands of speculators who piled in after December 31 will not get any of the free shares that come with the flotation which could

value the group at about £3 billion. The society has refused to say how big the windfall will be for the more than three million borrowers and 500,000 savers or how it will be structured, but the handouts will go to those who had at least £100 in their accounts or loans of £100 or more, on December 31. Savers who have had accounts for at least two years will receive extra shares based on the size of their balances.

However the society's plans could be undermined if a predator moved in and offered members more to take over the society. City experts believe the Alliance is more vulnerable to predators than the Woolwich, which recently announced its flotation, be-

cause of the unique structure of its business, with its ownership of Girobank.

Peter White, Alliance group chief executive, said that after more than a year's deliberation on whether to change status, Abbey National's predatory move against the National & Provincial tipped the board in favour.

But conversion would open a new chapter in the society's history, allowing it to "expand our share of the residential mortgage market, widen the range of personal financial services which we provide and develop the banking services we offer our corporate customers". He denied that the society would be on the acquisitions trail.

The Alliance's decision

leaves only one big building society, the Nationwide, supporting the mutual cause which has generally given customers a better deal than banks. The Nationwide is now seen to be crucial to the survival of building societies as mutual organisations.

Nationwide's chief executive, Brian Davies, said: "Customers have always preferred building societies because they believe they get a better service. Perhaps of late we have taken that loyalty for granted, and now it's time to prove what everyone already knows — that building societies will always be cheaper in the long run, than banks."

Notebook, page 11; Outlook, page 12

Further cut in base rate looks likely in wake of US move

Mark Tran in New York and Larry Elliott

THE prospect of a fresh cut in British borrowing costs was looming large last night after America's central bank cut its interest rates to boost growth.

Despite evidence yesterday that the Chancellor, Kenneth Clark, and the Governor of the Bank of England, Eddie George, are already at odds

over base rates, the move by the US Federal Reserve was being seen by dealers as the trigger for reductions elsewhere in the world.

With economic expansion in Germany and France slowing, speculation was mounting that the Bundesbank might spring a surprise at today's council meeting and reduce official German rates.

Gerard Lyons, chief economist with Japanese bank DKB, said that by March,

"there would be scope for lower rates in the UK, whatever Eddie George says".

British base rates have come down from 8.75 per cent to 6.25 per cent in two stages since the Budget, but most analysts believe keeping the economy robust ahead of the election will mean at least one more quarter-point cut, even if that means spurning Mr George's advice.

Yesterday's move by the Fed came after a meeting of

its policy-making Open Market Committee and amid mounting evidence that the US economy has weakened.

The discount rate, which the Fed charges to member banks for loans, came down to 5 per cent from 5.25 per cent, while the federal funds rate — the rate banks charge each other for short term loans — came down to 5.25 per cent from 5.5 per cent.

Notebook, page 11

Send a baby box to Bosnia this winter

Disinfectant, nappies, washing materials — not what you'd think of giving someone. But for a desperate mother in Bosnia trying to keep her child safe from infection, the basic essentials inside one of our baby boxes would mean the world.

Feed the Children will deliver your box directly into the hands of mothers in Bosnia — many of whom will be sheltering in freezing schools, factories, and bombed-out houses this winter.

Please send a baby box to Bosnia this winter — help a mother keep her baby safe.

for only £30

With love from a friend...

Call 0990 600610 now to tell us how many baby boxes you would like to send. OR please complete and return this form.

Please send _____ baby box(es) at £30 each on my behalf.

I enclose a cheque for £_____ (total amount) made payable to Feed the Children

OR Please debit £_____ from my Visa Access Switch

Card number _____

Last three digits of Switch card no. _____ Switch issue no. _____

Expiry date / Signature _____

Name (sps) _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Telephone _____

If you would like to send a message to a Bosnia mother, please send it with your donation and we will put it in your baby box. Please send to: Feed the Children, Dept 478, FREEPOST, Reading, RG1 1BR.

Registered charity, no. 303735

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مكتبة الجامعة



The Rev Brian Brown, and a scene from one of the animated cartoons, The Story Keepers, which were his brainchild and have been a hit in the US



MAIN PHOTOGRAPH SEAN SMITH

Video tales from the gospel push Pocahontas off her perch

Madeline Bunting Religious Affairs Editor

IT IS first-century Rome and Nero has launched a pogrom of Christians. At risk are the jovial, overweight baker, Ben, his beautiful wife, Helena, and the cute posse of

orphans they have taken under their wing. What follows is 13 action-packed animated videos, charting their fortunes as they pit their wits — and faith — against the evil Nero and his apocryphal henchmen. This is The Story Keepers, which took the American

home video market by storm when the first instalment stole a march on Disney's Pocahontas, beating it to the top of the charts last month. What sells the multi-million pound animation industry even more is that they have missed out on the potential of one of the oldest stories of all — the Gospel. For women, the adventures of the first-century family are large chunks of the life of Jesus Christ as told by Ben to fellow Christians in the underground movement. The man behind the video hit is a retired lecturer and Methodist minister, the Rev Brian Brown, who spent 10 years trudging around church leaders trying to find backers for his dream of bringing the Good News to an "unchurched generation."

Mr Brown, who was for 20 years a lecturer in religious education at Oxford Polytechnic, mortgaged his house several times over and even flew to the Vatican to pray with the Pope's adviser on television as part of his lobbying for financial backing. Finally, a coalition of Irish churches introduced him to Christian businessmen who put up the £4 million to make the video with a Hollywood-based team of animators. Ten per cent of profits will go back to the Irish churches. Mr Brown yesterday told representatives of British churches at the first British "Church Leaders are desperately worried about the biblical illiteracy of young people. This is a tool of evangelism, bringing the word of Jesus to millions outside the church."

The video is expected to sell 500,000 copies per episode in the US — another two episodes are being released in March — and the interest of major companies has now been triggered. Mr Brown is negotiating with British broadcasters and video companies over British rights as well as for a feature film in the US. The book of the video — in several versions for different age groups — is due out in Britain and the US next month. Story Keepers will also come out on CD Rom. After that come the merchandise agreements: mugs, pens, soft toys, blow up characters. Jesus Christ may yet get his cartoon face on shampoo bottles, sweets, knapsacks and a million other knick-knacks. "There's no question it will make millions. But it is not purely a commercial operation," Mr Brown said. It is not often that the Dean of Christchurch College, the Archbishop of Dublin and a host of other biblical and theological scholars get their names on the credits of a video cartoon. But, as Mr Brown explained, Story Keepers is the fruit of years of ecumenical discussions and expert advice and has won the approval of Christians as diverse as the Vatican and Bible Belt Americans. Representatives from the Salvation Army, the United Reform and Baptist churches were delighted, and nobody was carrying about commercialisation. As the Rev Geoff Shattock, a Baptist minister, put it: "This is going to introduce the Gospel in a post-Christian era."

New issue OUT NOW!

"I am rich. There's no point denying it."

Split reaction as Eva Peron's ghost walks

Calvin Sims in Buenos Aires

PARTY AT the Patagonia restaurant in Buenos Aires was expected to be a quiet dinner when, suddenly, the wall of sirens pierced the air. In walked Madonna — but she looked like Eva Peron, dressed in a 1950s black, fitted dress with a big skirt, her hair in a chignon and her blue eyes now brown. "The whole room gasped," said Court Hay, an American writer who was in the restaurant. "It was the ghost of Eva Peron."

Controversy about Madonna's suitability to play the former Argentine first lady has surrounded the singer since she arrived in Buenos Aires almost a fortnight ago to star in the film of Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical Evita. It is not hard to see why the producer picked a pop star experienced at playing sexually charged roles for the part of Peron in a film expected to portray Argentina's legendary first lady as an opportunist who slept her way to power. But a bitter debate continues over whether she is fit to portray Peron, whom many Argentines consider a saint.

Every day, hundreds of screaming fans, many with "Madonna, we love you" scrawled across their bodies, gather outside her hotel. "Madonna is the right choice for this movie because she, like Evita, is one of the common people," said Jorge Gutiérrez, a transvestite dressed in a garish lace outfit like one which was her trademark. It is precisely that image which offends die-hard Peronists. They maintain that Madonna is unfit to portray the wife of General Juan Peron, the populist strongman who dominated post-war Argentine politics for nearly three decades. Days before Madonna had arrived in Buenos Aires, hardliners had scrawled graffiti around the capital that read: "Evita lives! Madonna, get out!" The Argentinian president, Carlos Menem, a Peronist, told newspapers that

Ministers pass tax buck to councils

James Melkie and David Brindle

THE Government passed the spending buck last night to local authorities and increased the pressure on April's council tax bills. Ministers faced with another wipe-out in the May local elections prepared to blame Liberal Democrat and Labour-run councils for large rises in local taxes despite Treasury forecasts that average bills could rise by 8 per cent. The Government even relaxed some spending curbs yesterday on the proviso that the extra money went to education and social services or to police authorities as Whitehall grant rises by 2.8 per cent and overall spending by 3.2 per cent. But the tactic, made clear as MPs confirmed next year's local government spending settlement, provoked outrage from the Opposition, which accused ministers of effectively taking back half of the £1.1bn in pound income tax cut announced in the Budget. Labour, desperate to avoid

horror stories of excess under municipal socialism resurfacing in the run-up to the general election, said that council tax payers would face a £2.5 billion extra bill over three years — equivalent to 2p in the pound on income tax. Fire brigades, help for the elderly, and other services all faced cuts next year as a result of what Opposition MPs described as the "fantasy dinner racket" operated by the Tories in the way grants were determined. These favoured the 13 or 14 Tory-run authorities, especially Westminster council in London. The political arm-wrestling in the Commons came as social service chiefs warned that care homes and day centres might close, and charges for home help and day centres rise. Westminster council had short-changed local authorities by nearly £100 million. John Gummer, the Environment Secretary, told the Commons: "We take the view that local government should properly fund a slightly larger proportion of the costs of

their local services." The settlement included a 4.5 per cent increase in provision for education and a 6.9 per cent increase for personal social services. "We were told by councils that these were the top priorities," he said. "But there are already signs that councils are seeking to use that money for other purposes." Local decisions would be a measure of whether Labour and Liberal Democrat councils "say one thing and do another", Mr Gummer declared. There was no favouritism for individual councils. Objectives were based on objective assessments. Total standard spending — the sum which the Government thinks councils need in order to provide a standard level of services — for England for 1996/97 will be £44.83 billion. The small grant will be £25.5 billion. The shadow environment secretary, Frank Dobson, said: "Council taxpayers will end up paying more and getting less. This is a perfect excuse for the Government giving with one hand and taking away with the other."

Mr Dobson added: "The level the Government has set for the coming year is £1 billion lower than councils are actually spending this year, before taking into account inflation. "Councils will be faced with the dilemma of cutting services or facing the wrath of the auditor and the courts." Sir Jeremy Beecham, chairman of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, said that the 9.3 per cent increase allowed for by the Government would be whittled down by £100 million to cover local government reorganisation and £418 million needed to spend on care in the community programmes. Concern from the Association of Directors of Social Services also centres on government changes which increase the money paid by local authorities on behalf of people living in residential nursing homes under the community care system. Ministers allowed £48 million to help councils in England, but the ADSS and the Local Authorities Association believe that £141 million is needed.

US 'spies' dash Bosnian hopes

Martin Walker in Washington

THE Bosnian peace deal, hailed as a significant diplomatic success by the United States, is highly unstable and the region can be expected to plunge back into war once American troops leave at the end of the year, according to a leaked top-secret US intelligence report prepared for the White House. European troops may stay longer but they too will withdraw "after a decent interval" — leaving a highly dangerous situation in which Croatia will dominate Bosnia and is prepared to use force to recover Eastern Slavonia. "The former combatants share a deep mutual mistrust and will continue to seek to achieve their fundamental goals, rather than accommodation, even as the Dayton agreement proceeds," the report says. "They will see compromise as a zero-sum game and attempt to divide and manipulate the interna-

tional community in the way the accords are implemented." Published yesterday in the conservative Washington Times, the leaked report is the draft version of a National Intelligence Estimate, the condensed assessment of US intelligence agencies. It also details the further intelligence studies which are to be compiled by the Defence Intelligence Agency on the prospects that a military balance can be achieved in the future. Its publication came as France's president, Jacques Chirac, arrived in Washington on a state visit intended to celebrate the return of the French to the Nato fold and co-operation with the US. "Minor violations of the Dayton accords are expected while the Nato force is in place," the report says hopefully, but not "major outbreaks of violence that threaten the renewal of hostilities." US policy in arming and training the Bosnians is described as "a delicate orchestration process to ensure that the parties do not

simply prepare for another round of conflict." Noting that all sides are exhausted and war-weary, the report stops short of saying a new war is inevitable once the US and other Nato troops leave. But that is the outcome which is expected, along with a Croatian dominance that will take much of the meaning from the Government's vaunted sovereignty. The report says international actors — including Russia, Iran and other Islamic states — are not expected to undermine the Dayton accords, "although these and other states will back one side or another in disputes over interpreting the agreement." It says: "Iran and other Islamic states and movements are clearly anxious to use the foothold they have established in Bosnia and Croatia to advance their regional and global interests. The Islamic volunteers will not go quietly." The US intelligence summary, which echoes the pessimistic assessments of many

within the Bosnian government, could cause considerable embarrassment, particularly with Croatia, which is described as "the big winner" in the war. "Zagreb's military strategy is — and will continue to be — designed to prevent Muslims from linking their Bihac holdings with the central Muslim heartland," it says. "Bosnian Serbs are in no shape to resist a combined Croat-Muslim offensive, but they can resist the Muslims if the latter act alone." The intelligence assessment is based largely on reports sent back to Washington of the special Central Intelligence Agency task forces who have been deploying in the region since the ceasefire was agreed in October. Bringing together satellite-imaging analysts, political and economic experts and psychological warfare and propaganda teams, the CIA task forces represent the most intense US intelligence effort since the Gulf war.

What the hell is wrong with Catherine Bennett and her ilk? The Prince of Wales reads, prays, loves the theatre and music, tells jokes, likes a dry martini — and works his butt off to help deprived young people find a future. He detests the destruction of the environment and supports multi-culturalism — issues most Guardian readers would take extremely seriously. Does all that merit the hostility and contempt dished out by chattering hacks like Bennett?

Bel Mooney, Letters page 8

This month in Q, Damon Albarn comes clean about life in Blur: the fraught relationships, the financial rewards and his plans for a Great Escape from the Beatles of Britpop.

PLUS! Crack, kids and firefighting with Coolio; The showbiz childhood and all-Canadian angst of Alanis Morissette; Neil Diamond on marriage, moolah and misery, and — cue theramin! — the definitive story of the Beach Boys' sun-soaked '60s heyday.

ALSO! We're with the Banned! Q's guide to the records you weren't supposed to hear. And what the hell does The National Lottery think it is?

AND! in the world's only climate-controlled Reviews section: Lou Reed, Thin Lizzy, Beaties, Ministry, Eazy-E, and Babylon Zoo.

Drugs! Drink! Dust-ups!

BLUR

There's a blizzard of cocaine and I hate it!

ALANIS MORISSETTE
NEIL DIAMOND

THIN LIZZY • COOLIO • BEACHBOYS

Q Out now!
ALL THE PEOPLE, SO MANY PEOPLE.

News in brief

Minister rejects Marchioness plea

THE Government last night rejected one of the key recommendations of the inquest jury on the St Marchioness disaster victims that all crew on passenger launches should be required to wear inflatable lifejackets.

Camden gets tough on staff

NEARLY half the staff working for the London borough of Camden — including some who pledged to stay at their jobs after a £10 million National Lottery win last week — face dismissal and re-employment on poorer terms.

Judge's promise to woman

A JUDGE at Durham crown court ordered a mother, aged 83, to disclose her home phone number so that the Department of Social Security can trace her address, despite her fears that her ex-husband may track her.

Degrees of change

WOMEN graduating from British universities outnumbered men for the first time last year after 10 years of rapid growth in the number of students gaining first degrees.

Receiver called in at charity

A CHARITY which claims to raise money for aid projects in Africa has been taken into receivership following an investigation by the Charity Commission into alleged misappropriation of funds.

ITN strike called off

A STRIKE which threatened to disrupt ITN's main news programmes today was called off after an agreement was hammered out at Acas, the arbitration service.



Ideal home... the listed pigsty which English Heritage believes could become a 'des res' — at a price

PHOTOGRAPH GARRY WEASER

Council sinks £40,000 in pigsty

New Kennedy Heritage Correspondent

A KENT council has reluctantly voted to spend £40,000 on restoring a listed tin shack which an official said was "a pigsty, by name and by nature".

English Heritage and Gillingham borough council are locked in dispute over the Grade II listed Black House, which has been a house, a pigsty and a chicken coop, at a time when the entire listings system is under review.

English Heritage opposed a council proposal to move the house, saying this would virtually make it a new building.

The council has just voted "very, very reluctantly" to spend £40,000 on renovation, under threat of English Heritage carrying out the work itself and landing the council with a far higher bill.

The Grade II listing, the lowest category, means grants are at the discretion of English Heritage.

The councillors regard this as a total waste of money, and voted feeling that a gun had been put to their heads, said council spokesman Alan Watkins.

Richard Morris, the English Heritage historic buildings inspector who recommended the listing, said English Heritage was pursuing talks with the council to find a suitable future use for the building.

The shack is the tottering survivor of a haulier built around 1625, backing onto the Rainham marshes.

It only stands because props were put in last year to shore up rotting timbers, after the council served a dangerous buildings notice on itself.

English Heritage suggested restoring it as a residence, but the council believes this would cost at least £150,000, and be impossible to sell.

"We regard this as important building with a future," a spokeswoman for English Heritage said. "We regard this as a lost cause," said Mr Watkins.

The Department of National Heritage announced the Grade II listing of four more post-war buildings yesterday. They are: Richmond Swimming Baths, Surrey, completed in 1968; St Mary's School, Wallasey, Merseyside, 1962; former chapel at Hopwood Hall College, Middleton, Greater Manchester, 1965; Gillett House, Chichester Theological College, West Sussex, 1965.

Branson snub may hinder lottery probe

Andrew Culf Media Correspondent

THE barrister investigating bribery allegations surrounding the National Lottery conceded yesterday her inquiry would be hampered by Richard Branson's decision to boycott the proceedings.

Anne Rafferty QC, chairman of the Criminal Bar Association, was speaking as she formally opened the inquiry into an allegation made by the Virgin Group chairman on BBC1's Panorama in December that he had been offered a bribe to withdraw his bid to run the lottery.

Mr Branson complained the inquiry was not genuinely independent, had a limited remit and would be held in private.

He is unhappy because the inquiry was set up by Peter Davis, the director general of the Office of the National Lottery, who could be a witness.

Virgin spokesman said: "Richard will be happy to cooperate with any public inquiry, but he is not prepared to be involved with an inquiry that does not deal with the real issues... he is perfectly happy to give evidence in a court of law before a judge and jury."

Ms Rafferty, who adjourned the inquiry until February 29, said: "The inquiry will be impeded if Mr Branson, having

raised this here, does not come to the inquiry."

She said she hoped Mr Branson would give evidence. "It is a matter for him as to whether he feels more soothed when he hears how I run the inquiry."

She denied the investigation would be irrelevant without his participation and strongly defended her own independence. "If anyone thinks my impartiality is compromised by who chooses me and who pays me, they underestimate me and they have an interesting definition of integrity."

Under its terms of reference it is confined to seeking to establish the facts surrounding

Mr Branson's meeting with Mr Snowden in September 1993. Any subsequent action would be determined by Mr Davis.

The inquiry will be conducted in private to avoid the process becoming unwieldy and to deliver a crisp and prompt approach, she said.

Witnesses, who cannot be compelled to attend, will have the right to legal representation, but will not be permitted to conduct cross-examination.

Mr Snowden has indicated he will give evidence, and Ms Rafferty said she was keen to talk to the Panorama journalists and production team involved in setting up the interview with Mr Branson.

Carling case mars press watchdog delight

Andrew Culf

LORD Wakeham, chairman of the Press Complaints Commission, yesterday hailed a momentous year in which he claimed the body had proved its independence and ability to bite.

But publication of the commission's annual report coincided with a growing row

over its decision to reject complaints from Julie Carling, estranged wife of the England rugby union captain Will Carling, that the Sun had invaded her privacy.

In a letter to Virginia Bottomley, the National Heritage Secretary, Mrs Carling's solicitors said the adjudication proved that self-regulation did not work.

But the commission agreed

with the tabloid that Mrs Carling had forfeited her right to privacy because she had previously put her private life into the public domain through interviews and articles designed to promote her career as a television presenter.

The adjudication was bound to encourage further media excess in relation to so-called public figures, her solicitors claimed. It also left Mrs Carling "beyond the protection of the PCC and without any other effective remedy".

Lord Wakeham, speaking on Radio 4's The World at One, said if people encouraged details to come into the

public domain it was not unreasonable for newspapers to comment upon them.

The commission's annual report revealed a 30 per cent increase in the number of complaints in 1995, a rise described as a welcome sign of growing public awareness of its role.

Lord Wakeham said the commission's ability to demonstrate its independence as the supervisor of self-regulation had convinced the Government there was no need for a statutory crackdown on the press.

But he warned: "We do not take this transformation in the fortunes of press self-regulation for granted. There is

not one inch of room for complacency. We are well aware that memories are short and that just a few ill-judged stories could again throw the future of self-regulation into doubt."

He said the commission was offering an increasingly effective service to the public. "I am convinced self-regulation is delivering the goods. I want in 1996 to build on this success."

Of the 2,508 complaints received, 70 per cent related to accuracy and the majority were resolved directly by editors to the satisfaction of complainants. Twelve per cent of cases related to alleged intrusion into privacy.

Murdered backpacker buried

Thai judges sentence Buddhist monk to firing squad

Lawrence Donegan

JOHANNE Masheder, the English backpacker murdered while holidaying in Thailand, was buried yesterday, hours after a Buddhist monk was sentenced to death for killing her.

Mourners packed St Michael's Church in the Cheshire village of Wincle where they heard the Reverend David Moir, her parish priest, say the trainee solicitor's death had devastated the community.

"It wasn't just that it was someone from our village, but that it was a young member of a family this village have taken to their hearts and for whom that feeling is reciprocal. Jo had been so universally loved and so full of life, a young woman of whom everyone was justly proud," he said.

Mr Moir said Ms Masheder's family must not allow her murder to trigger a life of bitterness.

He added: "Grief is a debilitating thing and I am sure from what I know of Johanne that she wouldn't want us to hold on too much to this feeling which is anyway so enslaving."

Ms Masheder, aged 23, dis-



Johanne Masheder, killed by Yodchart Suephoo (right) who wanted money to buy drugs



appeared in December, days before she was due to return home to start work as a solicitor after a three-month trip around the world.

Her parents, Stuart and Jackie Masheder, travelled to Thailand in an effort to find their daughter. Her body was discovered in a cave near a Buddhist temple at Kanchanaburi in western Thailand on January 14 — three weeks after she was due home.

Yodchart Suephoo, a 21-year-old Buddhist monk, confessed he had killed the Englishwoman after robbing her of money to buy himself drugs.

Yodchart, who had a previous conviction for rape, told a court hearing in Kanchanaburi yesterday he had not meant to kill Ms Masheder but could not control himself because of his drug addiction.

In a statement read by one of the two presiding judges, the court said the monk's behaviour was "not correctable".

"He has damaged the reputation of our religious institution and the reputation of the country since the victim was a tourist who came to visit our country. The judge sentenced Yodchart to death by shooting.

The court refused Yodchart's request that he be immediately executed at the scene of his crime. Under Thai law all death sentences must be reviewed by a second court.

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A group of influential scientists want to pinpoint genes that influence intelligence as measured by IQ scores, and they plan to do the work while telling as few people about it as possible. OnLine page 2

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World news in brief

Polish communists nominate new PM

POLAND'S reformed communists held on to power yesterday after negotiations with their junior coalition partner, the Peasant Party, brought the nomination of a new head of government, diffusing the crisis caused by the resignation of prime minister Jozef Oleksy amid allegations he spied for Russia.

The new candidate is Mr Oleksy's party colleague, the deputy speaker of parliament, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz. A respected technocrat, Mr Cimoszewicz, aged 45, supports continuing market reforms and European integration.

President Aleksander Kwasniewski was expected to accept the nomination today before leaving for the World Economic Summit in Denver. He had urged a speedy resolution to the crisis while trying to allay Western fears that the spy scandal would affect Polish credibility for Nato membership.

The composition of the new cabinet is not yet known, but few observers expect big policy or personnel changes. Mr Oleksy, who denies any wrongdoing, was elected party leader the day after he was forced to resign. — *Matthew Brzezinski, Warsaw.*

Saint protects missiles

SAIN'T BARBARA, a fourth-century martyr traditionally prayed to in the West by those in danger of sudden death, has been made the patron saint of Russia's intercontinental nuclear missile force. The command centre from which the Strategic Rocket Forces have the power to take the world apart in considerably less time than it took the God of Genesis to put it together was visited on Tuesday by the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Alexei II, who presented generals with an icon of the saint.

The patriarch said: "Her (Saint Barbara's) presence before God will give all you, dear brothers and sisters, peace, prosperity, health, strength and courage in carrying out military service for the glory of our fatherland."

The patriarch said he had chosen St Barbara because her feast day, 17 December, was on the same date as Russia's officially appointed Rocket Forces Day. Western hagiographers, however, consider the martyr to be the patron saint of people with highly dangerous jobs, including artillerymen.

The Oxford Dictionary of Saints records that her father was said to have been killed by lightning. "This was the basis of her patronage of those in danger of sudden death, first by lightning, and then by subsiding mines, or cannonballs. Hence her patronage of miners and gunners." — *James Meek, Moscow.*

China serenades Hong Kong

THE People's Liberation Army of China has just released 15 bracing songs to serenade Hong Kong into submission when Britain hands over the colony next year.

Starring members of China's post-1987 military garrison, the new recording includes I Love You Hong Kong, To the Fragrant River as a Soldier, On the Training Ground, and Put Your Heart at Ease Mother, Put Your Heart at Ease Motherland.

A cover photograph shows a soldier, sailor and airman, two of them holding Chinese Kalashnikovs, beneath a billowing red flag against the skyscrapers of Hong Kong's central business district.

The PLA's debut on Hong Kong's music scene is part of a charm offensive by the military. But the songs are in mandarin, a dialect understood by few in Hong Kong. — *Andrew Higgins, Hong Kong.*

Rights groups protest

INTERNATIONAL human rights groups have protested at the appointment of the Honduran military commander in chief, General Luis Alfonso Discua, to his country's delegation on the United Nations Security Council.

Gen Discua was the first commander of the CIA-trained Battalion 316 which has been identified by the government's commissioner for human rights as the unit involved in the torture, kidnapping and murder of dozens of leftwing opponents during the 1980s. His appointment as one of two deputies to the Honduran permanent representative was made personally by the president, Carlos Roberto Reina, after the two clashed last December over attempts to bring 10 military officers to court.

The World Organisation Against Torture in Geneva yesterday called for Gen Discua to be dismissed. Honduras's seat on the Security Council expires at the end of the year. — *David Palliser.*

Serbs fear their relatives' graves in Sarajevo may be desecrated, reports Julian Borger in Viakovo

Dead raised to rest in peace

LAZAR VUKOVIC never imagined his life would turn out like this. When he buried his mother and son in Viakovo cemetery, he did not think he would be back on his hands and knees scraping the dirt off their coffins and sweating as he raised them from their graves.

With the help of neighbours and his surviving son, Monicilo, Mr Vukovic worked slowly and methodically from dawn yesterday, straightening his back only to share a ceremonial glass of plum brandy.

Clearly a man in rigid control of his emotions, he worked quietly, confining himself to murmured remarks about the soil, the iciness of the wind, and the surprising weight of the coffins.

His mother, Stajna, was killed in 1992 when a mortar hit the family home. Two years later Mr Vukovic buried his son, Obren, in a nearby plot. Obren was aged 29, but he died of a weak heart, driven beyond its limits by the war.

About 40 Serb families have come to Viakovo cemetery to dig up the remains of relatives. They will take them with them on a trek in search of new homes when Serb districts of Sarajevo are transferred to government control on Saturday.

Efforts by international agencies to persuade them to stay have been poorly funded, and have so far proved puny against a wave of panic. Sarajevo Serbs fear Muslim reprisals

Last of Islamic mujahedin troops bow out

THE last group of Islamic mujahedin who fought on the side of the mainly-Muslim army in Bosnia's war has left the country, a Nato spokesman said yesterday.

"The remaining foreign forces left Koprivna (in north-west Bosnia) at 7.30 hours yesterday morning and were escorted to the Croatian border by civil police," Lieutenant-Colonel Mark Rayner told a briefing.

The presence of the volunteers, Muslims from different Islamic countries, alarmed the Pentagon and a clause on the removal of all "foreign forces" was included in the Dayton peace agreement.

Washington apparently feared that the mujahedin might see US peacekeeping

forces in Bosnia as a legitimate alternative target once the war against the Serbs had stopped.

The Pentagon put its 13,000 troops deployed with the Nato-led Implementation Force (I-FOR) on alert last week, saying its intelligence reports indicated "increased activity" from the mujahedin in Bosnia. — *Reuters.*

Lazar Vukovic is more matter of fact than his son: "It's just that we need to go to the graves every Sunday, and when we are on the other side of the line, we wouldn't be able to do that, and that would be very painful."

An aluminium sarcophagus lay beside each grave. The family had bought them from a local ironmonger, fearing that the old wooden coffins would be in no shape to transport.

They were proven right. Four feet down, their spades hit the wooden lid of Simina's casket. Lazar scraped the soil away and it was clear that it had collapsed under the weight of earth. They carefully slipped cords underneath and hauled it up to the harsh winter sunlight.

One of Viakovo's grave-diggers wandered over to tell them that the coffin was so heavy because of water filtered out of the saturated clay. They would have to drain it before the wooden coffin was placed in the new metal sarcophagus.



Troubled waters... A team of Turkish commandos and a Turkish journalist return to Turkey yesterday after landing on the disputed island of Imia in a midnight operation

Aegean retreat irks Greek MPs

HELena Smith in Athens and agencies

GREECE'S Socialist government came under a bitter attack yesterday for heeding President Clinton's call to back down from a military confrontation with Turkey over a disputed rocky outcrop in the Aegean.

The government, under the new prime minister, Costas Simitis, faced calls to resign and accusations of treason when parliament met to discuss what many saw as a humiliation in the face of Turkish threats.

"The removal of Greek troops from the island and the lowering of the Greek flag constitute an act of treason," Militiadis Evert, leader of the conservative New Democracy party, told parliament. "You

have only one thing left to do — resign."

The Greek government achieved a disengagement of Greek and Turkish forces around the island of Imia and a de-escalation of the crisis, Mr Simitis told parliament in angry shouts of "traitors" and "sell-out" from opposition MPs.

Members of New Democracy and of another nationalist party walked out in protest during a debate before a confidence vote which the Socialists are expected to win.

But a certain calm had returned to the Aegean after Mr Clinton insisted that it was unacceptable for two Nato allies to go to war over an island which is only used to graze goats. He said Greece and Turkey "have too much in common and too much to gain in getting along with

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IT SAYS YOU'VE ARRIVED

Czech party slows race to Nato

Jonathan Steele

THE first hint of a pause in central Europe's rush to join Nato has emerged in Prague, with the Social Democratic Party's promise of a referendum before any decision is taken.

To the displeasure of United States diplomats, the party has also said that if the Czech Republic joins Nato it should not permit foreign troops or nuclear weapons to be based on its territory.

The Social Democrats are running second to the ruling Civic Democratic Party in opinion polls before parliamentary elections in May. Like the rightwing government, the party used to advocate unqualified entry to Nato. But delegates at the recent party congress forced

the leadership to accept that any decision to join must be put to the nation.

The retreat from Nato-fanaticism mirrors poll findings in Hungary and Poland, where broad public support for Nato membership has declined somewhat.

In Hungary, a poll late last year found support dropping from 46 to 38 per cent and opposition rising from 11 to 30 per cent after Nato published its long-awaited conditions for enlargement. Although the alliance set no a priori requirement for new members to accept nuclear weapons and foreign troops, it did not offer them a veto.

In Poland, a poll showed 59 per cent against foreign troops and 62 per cent against nuclear weapons in Poland after entry to Nato.

The new hesitancy over the terms of Nato membership appears to be a revival of the mood which swept through central Europe a decade ago during the fierce debate about stationing Soviet SS-20 and American Pershing and Tomahawk missiles on each side of the cold-war divide. In Germany and central Europe many felt they would be the first victims of an exchange of medium-range nuclear missiles by the two superpowers.

Central Europeans are realising that Nato membership carries risks as well as gains. They also see that long-standing alliance signatories have always had a carte blanche membership. The Czech Social Democrats' new policy says the country should follow the Danish or Norwegian models of Nato membership, which ban foreign bases and nuclear weapons.

Analysts in Prague say US diplomats are particularly concerned by a possible ban on foreign troops and bases in central Europe. Washington views the troop-free zone in Denmark and Norway as less important because both are "flank countries".

In advance of possible Hungarian membership of Nato, the US has taken over a large former Warsaw Pact base at Kaposvar in the Danube plain. The Pentagon is using it as a staging area for troops implementing the Bosnian peace accords, but analysts presume the US wants to turn it into a permanent facility for American use.

Vaclav Klaus, the Czech prime minister, wants no limits on Nato. He said Czechs should not behave "like a passenger who takes the tram but does not buy a ticket".

'Without the idea of art': that's a chilling notion, but it may be that finally after 2,500 years, literature in the widest possible sense is surrendering to technology. After all, in just 50 years the study of Latin and Greek has been reduced to a tiny specialist area and it looks as if departments of English will follow.

Henry Porter G2 cover story

Handwritten signature: Julian Borger

There is little for Yeltsin to celebrate, with poor poll ratings and an exodus of the country's brightest

Birthday blues for Boris as his popularity sinks

David Hearst in Moscow

ARUSSIAN president's 65th birthday is usually quite an event. In the old days he could reasonably expect to award himself a golden star of Hero of Socialist Labour, which would be presented at a Kremlin ceremony broadcast on state television. Gifts would pour into the Kremlin; bright carpets and fans bearing the great leader's face from the Asian republics, model tractors, aircraft, tanks and missiles from workers' collectives. The celebrations would culminate in an assembly at the Bolshoi Theatre in the evening. Boris Yeltsin, who turns 65 today, will be spared all this. "Going by past years, we do not expect any public engagements," an official in his accreditation department said.

The president will have a regular working day and he will celebrate his birthday with his work colleagues and family. It will have to be a quiet family affair if the telegrams the president is receiving are anything to go by. One such telegram read: "The people of the town of Salek, of the Rostov region, are indignant about the cruelest violation of law and human rights linked to the start of the president's electoral campaign." Russian railway workers were apparently ordered to sign, on threat of dismissal, the official petition supporting Mr Yeltsin's candidacy. On Saturday the president crossed up to the wheeze as only he knew how — by threatening to "beat" his deputy prime minister, Oleg Soskovets, who runs his campaign. Some railway workers had been told they would not

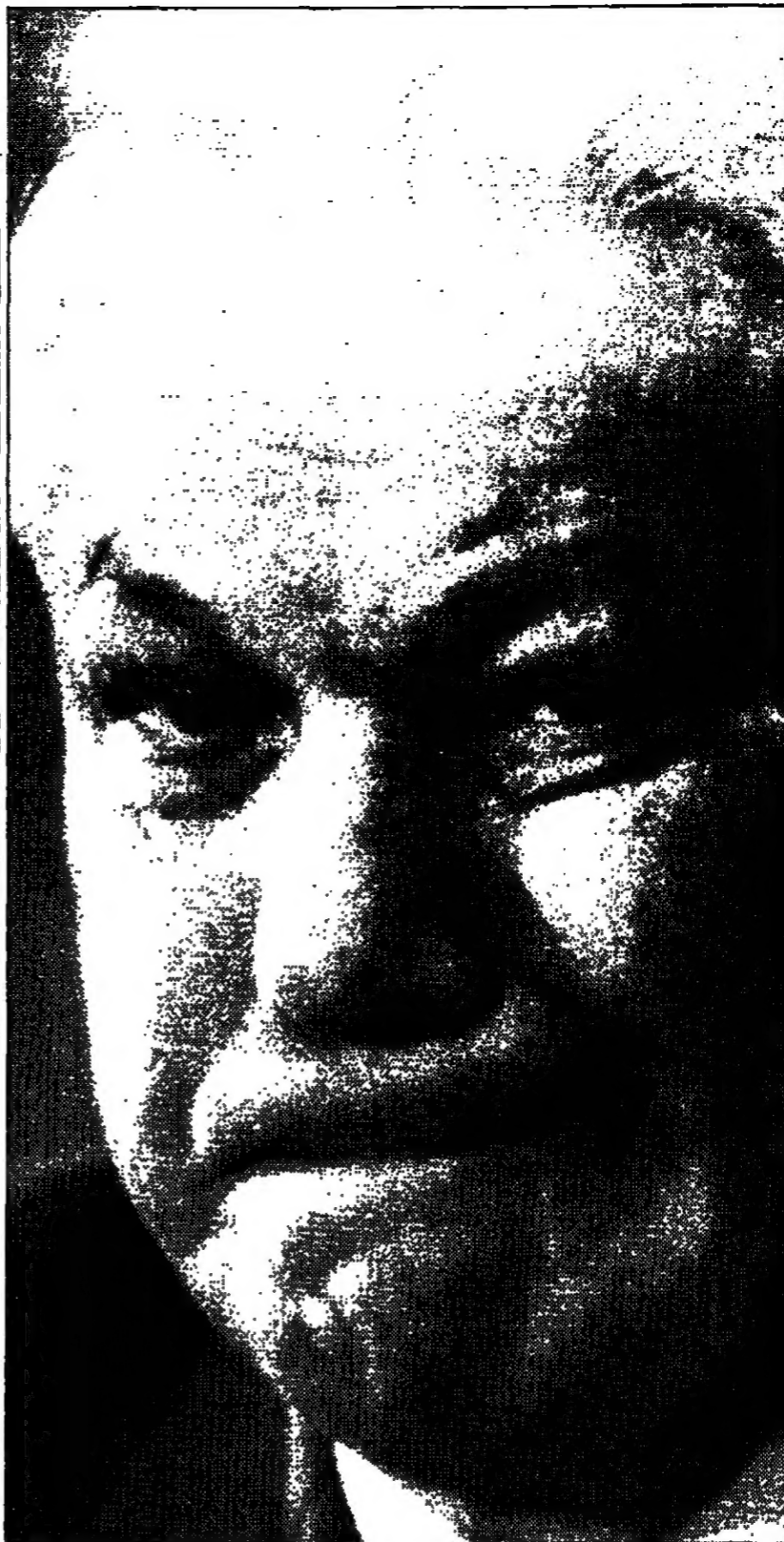
be paid unless they signed his nomination. He needs 1 million signatures. But this is mild in comparison with many Russians think of their president. Activists from the All Russian Fund of Social Support for the First Russian President in Mr Yeltsin's home town of Yekaterinburg were disillusioned. Angelina Shor said: "Thanks to the activities of the president's circle, we found ourselves in such dirt... I am not only not going to agitate for Yeltsin, I won't vote for him anymore." Reactions to Mr Yeltsin were worse when they came from people who had been close to the president. Gavril Popov, Moscow's former mayor, who helped him to power, said: "Yeltsin can't break with two fundamental qualities of his personality — his populism and bossiness."

Pavel Voshchanov, his former press officer, said: "Not only your pocket, but your reason prompts you to say, 'For God Sake he must go'." According to opinion polls, Mr Yeltsin has sunk to 10th position, with only 5 per cent of Russians expressing confidence in his candidacy. It is hard to find supporters. One, an academic, said: "I will vote for him, as many of the Italian Christian Democrats voted in the 1970s — holding their noses." Sergei Filatov, a former supporter, said: "The last steps of the president have upset me. Everything which happens near the president provokes concern, whether you talk about the state of his health, his security service or about the existence of a shadow centre of power." He should know. Mr Yeltsin sacked him as head of his administration two weeks ago.

Hungry wolves invade Estonia

Jon Henley in Tallinn

EXPECT the worst from the east, the Estonians say: If it's not Tsar Peter's cavalry it will be the Red Army. This winter, it is Russian wolves. Two unusually cold months have frozen Lake Peipsi, which forms much of Estonia's eastern border with Russia. This has allowed hungry grey wolves to cross into the Baltic state's deep forests, swelling the native population. Hunters estimate up to 800 wolves may be at large in Estonia, a country the size of the Netherlands, which might naturally support a wolf population a tenth of this size. "They are a problem this year," said Jaak Tambets, the environment ministry's senior conservation officer. "They take wild boar, elk and roe deer, and sometimes cattle and pets. We don't know exactly how many there are, but it's a lot." There have been no recorded attacks on humans, though a wolf was recently sighted six miles from the capital, Tallinn. The Estonian government has allocated funds to equip wolf hunters with walkie-talkies. Extra hunting licences have been granted. Wolf hunters enter snow-covered forest clearings carrying guns and reels of twine knotted with scraps of red hunting. Winding the twine through the trees, they drive the wolves into the trap where they stop short, apparently scared by the fluttering cloth. Last winter some 200 were shot this way; the figure could be higher this year, Mr Tambets said. Mass deportations and collectivisation during 50 years of Soviet occupation turned parts of Estonia into a wolf's paradise, by restoring the animal's natural habitat. A series of mild winters — bad for hunting — helped to boost numbers. In Estonian folklore, the wolf was both admired and feared. One of the few creatures strong enough to overpower the devil, it was too terrifying to be called by its real name and was known as the Grey Cotton Man, or Scratch Bye.



Lost for words... President Boris Yeltsin, who is expected to celebrate his 65th birthday quietly today, has alienated many of his former supporters who helped him to power

Russia's youth vote with their feet

Disillusioned rich students are leaving in droves to study and work abroad, writes Carol Williams in Moscow

"IHATE my country," said Maria Mikhailova as she Delta Air Lines flight from New York taxied toward the gate at Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport. "I'm excited about seeing my family again, but I just cannot live here anymore." The economics student, aged 21, said, gazing with disgust at the dimly lit terminal. She was back for a visit after her first three months at Harvard — an educational opportunity unthinkable for Russians not that long ago, and one that had cost her hard-working parents dearly. But if Ms Mikhailova and thousands of other youths from the urban elite who are studying abroad opt to stay there, the exodus will take a heavy toll on Russia's hopes for a democratic future. Like many members of the emerging privileged class who have come of age at a time when Russia has open borders, Ms Mikhailova has had the chance to compare the hardships at home with

the abundance abroad and has decided that a life of sacrifice is not for her. "I want to live in America or England or France, but not here," she said. "I don't believe anything good will ever be created in Russia." The children of those prospering from Russia's new-found capitalism are leaving in droves to study abroad and to start careers in countries where they might be better rewarded. The threat of being drafted for duty in Chechnya, the rise in crime and violence in the cities, the corruption of their once-respected educational institutions are reasons why young people want to give up and get out. More than 2,000 visas are issued for Russian students by the United States consulate each year, and thousands of students are thought to be enrolled in private European institutions. The only deterrents for young Russians who decide to stay abroad are the legal and economic conditions in their country of choice.

Nearly every successful business person in Moscow argues that foreign study is the best investment parents can make for their children. Many wealthy parents also see it as a way of protecting their children against the rise in crime. "Many new businessmen here are in a position to send their children abroad for education," said Alexander Shvachenko, head of the Moscow office of the international student exchange programme, Youth for Understanding. A common feeling among young people is a weakening desire to return to build a better Russia. "I don't feel any obligation to this country," said Masha Zarakovich, aged 20, who returned for the winter holidays. She is on a scholarship at Berry College in Mount Berry, Georgia. "The only patriotic feelings I have are for my parents, for the flat where I grew up, for

my friends — certainly not for the government." Dmitri Bogatyrev, who is studying civil engineering at Moscow State University, said the quality of higher education has suffered tremendously in recent years because the economic crisis has fostered bribery and cheating. "At MSU, a diploma costs £7,000. Everyone knows this. At lesser schools, you can buy one for £5,000," he said. Mr Bogatyrev, who went to school in New York while his father, a television correspondent, was working there, also blamed the sorry state of Russian higher education on the lack of financial support. "How can the government keep the best professors when they pay £20 or £25 a month?" he said. Russian education officials acknowledge the consequences of a youthful brain drain. Mikhail Myasnikov, chief of the foreign relations department of the state committee for higher education, said: "It always hurts to lose something that belongs to you, especially your young people and their idealistic values." "But once we decided to become a democratic country, we had to come to terms with this." — Los Angeles Times.

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Finance Guardian

Former Labour leader attacked by Conservatives over £460m aid for troubled Spanish state airline

Fury over Kinnock bail-out

Julia Wolf in Brussels and Keith Harper

THE former Labour leader and EU Transport Commissioner, Neil Kinnock, provoked a furious political reaction from Conservative ministers and backbenchers last night for allowing Spain to pump \$7 billion pesetas (\$460 million) into its ailing state carrier Iberia.

petition in the community aviation market." He pointed out that UK airlines competed in Europe without subsidy, and it was time the EU insisted that other airlines were also run on purely commercial lines.

losing money for years." He also claimed it was only three years ago that the commission approved over \$500 million in state aid for Iberia, with the express condition that no further aid would be granted.

during Prime Minister's questions, as the Government seeks to take advantage of a former Labour leader giving approval to a member state bailing out an uncompetitive business. But Sir Leon Brittan, the EU's trade commissioner and a former Tory Industry Minister, backed the decision.

subsidy to Air France, which was approved by Brussels. BA, which last December attacked the preliminary deal struck between Mr Kinnock and the Spanish government, said it found the commission's ruling "surprising".

In the Iberia case, the Spanish government had originally sought to provide 130 billion pesetas (£688 million) to help the airline get back on its feet. This figure was later raised to 180 billion pesetas (£730 million). But the commission refused to allow the funding unless there was a big corporate restructuring.

Notebook

Chancellor coins the right spiel



Edited by Mark Miener

AS THE latest set of minutes shows, Chancellor Kenneth Clarke is more concerned about the real economy than the traditional preoccupations of central bankers — the money supply, the level of the exchange rate, the credibility of policy and so on.

One inescapable conclusion of the Alliance & Leicester decision is that it leaves the Nationwide carrying the flag of mutualism. If it, too, were to opt to tread the route mapped out by the likes of the Abbey National, the Halifax, the Leeds, the Woolwich and now the Alliance & Leicester, then the mutual movement would be in serious danger of disappearing off all but the most regional of maps.

That is worrying. Mutual societies do not make a stakeholder society, but are rather closer to it in ethos than a shareholder democracy based on either dogma-driven, cut-price privatisations or the free hand-outs from institutions heading for the market.

Passengers take flight as huge debts and splits ground Iberia

BRUSSELS' bail-out finds Iberia in a perilous state, *Adela Gooch writes from Madrid.* It has losses of 180 billion pesetas, management, unions and pilots disagree over a restructuring scheme and passengers are infuriated by constant strikes and poor service.

This week unions called for the renegotiation of a viability plan, devised last year, which sought to reduce the 22,000 workforce by 3,500 over 12 months and introduce average pay cuts of 8.3 per cent. Talks between management and unions continued

yesterday — the deadline for agreement on the plan. Much of Iberia's previous EU handout, 150 billion pesetas in 1992, paid for an ambitious expansion programme in Latin America. Iberia's 85 per cent stake in Aerlineas Argentinas and smaller holdings in Chile's

Ladeco and Venezuela's Viava will have to be sold off under new conditions imposed by Brussels. A series of stoppages last autumn cost the airline 7 billion pesetas and disgruntled passengers have since switched to private airlines.

Clarke rift with George widens

Larry Elliott
Economics Editor

CITY suspicion of a rift over interest rates between the Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, and Bank of England Governor, Eddie George, deepened yesterday when it was revealed that the Bank had its doubts about the first of the two base-rate reductions since the Budget.

— which he said would dip below the Government's 2.5 per cent target by 1997 — justified his support for a modest rate cut.

But while the short-term outlook for both consumer and producer prices was good, there were warning signals for the longer term, notably the acceleration in the money supply, weakness of the pound and the possibility that the economy would pick up anyway during 1996.

According to the minutes, he added that a bigger cut than a quarter point would suggest that "the top priority were no longer the attainment of the inflation target. That could seriously damage the credibility of the monetary framework".

David Walton, economist at Goldman Sachs, the US investment bank, said: "Since these minutes, base rates have been cut by a further 0.25 points. From the tone of the remarks, it is clear that the Chancellor was the driving force behind the second cut."

"It is difficult to believe that the Governor could have been anything other than distinctly unenthusiastic about the January cut."

Meanwhile, the decision by the Bundesbank to trim its Repo market rate from 3.55 per cent to 3.40 per cent renewed hopes that it would announce a further cut in its official discount rate from three per cent to 2.5 per cent when it meets today.

While most City economists said the Bundesbank was likely to wait for the January money supply figures before moving, some did not rule out an attempt to catch dealers by surprise in an attempt to lower the mark's exchange rate.



Making a point... Lord Hanson in combative form yesterday

PHOTOGRAPH: GRAMMA TURKISH

Hanson demerges his critics

Jon King

THREE hecklers were thrown out of Hanson's annual shareholders' meeting at London's Barbican yesterday after the conglomerate's chairman, Lord Hanson, lost his patience with them following disturbances.

son, Lord Hanson's son, was yesterday driven to insist he had not been demoted following Tuesday's decision to split the conglomerate. Mr Hanson, corporate development director, will continue as a director of the ramp building products business, which retains the name Hanson, and is widely expected to become its chief executive, replacing Derek Boham, when Lord Hanson retires as chairman next year.

tions from shareholders. There were complaints levelled at the £100,000 donation to the Conservative Party, the election of former Home Secretary Kenneth Baker as a non-executive director, and Hanson's failure to appoint any women to its board.

2,000-strong meeting. In all, the meeting was a strange cocktail of business and showbusiness, with the board and shareholders rubbing shoulders with personalities including former James Bond Roger Moore, who stars in the new Hanson TV commercial, snooker star Ray Reardon, and disc-jockey David Hamilton, a mainstay of Hanson's easy-listening radio station, Melody FM.

EC chief unveils his strategy for jobs and single currency

John Palmer in Brussels and Alex Duvall Smith in Paris

THE European Commission president, Jacques Santer, yesterday announced a twin-track strategy to generate jobs and protect the timetable for moving to monetary union in 1999.

stalled, trans-European infrastructure projects, small and medium-sized companies and increased research and development. The money can be found thanks to under-spending on agriculture and the virtual disappearance of the EU food mountains.

Some Commission experts believe that an EU pact — under which trade unions would agree to moderate wage increases and allow more flexible working practices while governments agreed to cut payroll taxes — could create millions of extra jobs.

The need for urgent action was underlined in France where the jobless total rose in the last two months of 1995 to over three million or 11.7 per cent, despite a government plan to get the long-term unemployed back to work. Official figures published yesterday showed that 57,000 more people joined the dole queues in November and December amid forecasts that the economic slowdown could boost unemployment to 12.3 per cent in June.

Mr Santer will visit all EU capitals to win support for a jobs summit in May to work out details of the pact.

Rifkind rebuffed by firms over Social Chapter 'hypocrisy' claim

Tory attempt to nail Blair backfires, Simon Beavis and Sarah Ryle report

AN attempt by Malcolm Rifkind to carry the Tory campaign against Labour hypocrisy into the foreign policy arena backfired yesterday when business leaders told him they were more worried by the Government's economic record than the Social Chapter.

Mr Blair described the Social Chapter as a set of principles and not law and said he would only endorse measures on their merits.

consultation and equality in the workplace brought in under qualified majority voting (QMV). The veto would be surrendered on further issues later, he said.

the CBI's North-west region, said companies were not finding they were suffering by being signed up to the Maastricht Treaty.

Tiny's pay was £795,683 in final months at Lonrho

Lisa Buckingham

OUSTED tycoon Tiny Rowland was the highest paid director of the Lonrho trading group in 1995 despite having been sacked without a penny just five months into the financial year.

a week. The maverick Mr Rowland, who founded Lonrho some 35 years ago and remains a shareholder, has been one of the UK's highest-paid executives for a number of years.

The group's annual report says Mr Rowland's basic salary was augmented by expense payments — totalling £273,000 in his last five months with Lonrho — relating to the cost of entertaining overseas visitors.

Other directors were given up to £18,000 for company cars and private medical insurance. The total cost of Lonrho's boardroom dropped from £2.5 million in 1994 — when £2.3 million was paid in compensation to departing executives — to £4.7 million last year.

TOURIST RATES — BANK SELLS

Australia 1.97	France 7.44	Italy 2.90	Singapore 2.30
Austria 15.15	Germany 2.1800	Malta 0.54	South Africa 5.34
Belgium 44.50	Greece 368.00	Netherlands 2.4500	Spain 193.00
Canada 2.02	Hong Kong 11.44	New Zealand 2.20	Sweden 10.35
Cyprus 0.79	India 54.25	Norway 9.50	Switzerland 1.77
Denmark 8.43	Ireland 0.6500	Portugal 226.50	Turkey 80.10
Finland 6.81	Israel 4.72	Saudi Arabia 5.58	USA 1.4700

Supplied by NatWest Bank (excluding Indian rupee and Israeli sheqel)

Outlook/ High street banking battle heats up



Simon Everard, chairman of A&L, is looking forward to being liberated from building society rules

A&L joins big league but customers may lose out

Pauline Springett

THE Alliance & Leicester's decision to opt for banking status may puzzle many of its existing customers. After all, it owns Girobank and, as far as the public is concerned, already carries on many banking activities.

Simon Everard, chairman of A&L, is looking forward to being liberated from building society rules. The decision to opt for banking status may puzzle many of its existing customers.

A recent report by the Independent Banking Advisory Service said that complaints about Britain's high street banks leapt by a fifth last year to more than 18,000.

Repossession charges in other areas. The Consumers' Association is also gloomy about the long-term prospects for customers. In its latest Which? survey, published today, it acknowledged that building societies have sound reasons for wanting to convert to banks.

A thousand families lose homes each week

GIN JONES

NEARLY 1,000 families lost their homes each week last year, according to figures published yesterday by the Council of Mortgage Lenders which showed repossessions rising again.

forced by a fall in long-term arrears. The number of homeowners whose arrears are more than 10 per cent of their mortgage fell 16 per cent to 116,300 and those more than 12 months behind fell 27 per cent to 85,200.

Ford's poor sales drive down profit

Mark Tran in New York

PROFITS at Ford, America's second largest car maker, fell to \$4.1 billion (£2.7 billion) last year, a 32 per cent fall from a record \$6.3 billion in 1994 when it introduced several new models.

switch to new models of cars and trucks that make up about 35 per cent of sales volume in North America. These include updated versions of the Taurus and Escort.

News in brief

Rhône-Poulenc set for £1.3bn fire sale

FRENCH chemicals group Rhône-Poulenc plans to sell off assets worth 10 billion francs (£1.3 billion) over the next two years. It aims to curb debt levels that have been augmented by its share of the acquisition cost of Fisons by its majority-owned offshoot, Rhône-Poulenc Rover.

Airport delays cut

AVERAGE delays for UK flights have dropped from 14 minutes to four minutes since 1992, while air traffic delays in Europe have halved in that time, Transport Secretary Sir George Young announced yesterday.

Halifax insurance switch

THE Halifax Building Society has announced plans to launch a general insurance company which will sell a full range of personal and household insurance policies underwritten by Royal Insurance.

Novell sells WordPerfect

Nicholas Baxendale Technology Editor

NOVELL is selling WordPerfect, one of the world's most successful word processing software, for a fraction of the \$885 million (£570 million) it paid less than two years ago.

PerfectWorks, a productivity tool, and Envoy, an electronic publishing product. Novell agreed to buy WordPerfect for \$1.4 billion in March 1994 but saw the value of the deal drop to \$885 million as its share price fell before completion.

cent of the world market for graphic software packages, with some 20 million customers. It hopes to sell updated versions of WordPerfect and PerfectOffice for Windows \$6 to its existing customer base and interest WordPerfect's 55 million users in its graphics software.

Bloomberg goes trading

Patrick Donovan City Editor

AMBITIOUS plans to set up a global share market are being unveiled today with a ground-breaking deal that could allow subscribers to the Bloomberg news agency to trade through London's Tradepoint stock exchange.

development with Bloomberg opens up our market to a much wider audience with, for example, dealers in the Far East and North America being able to trade directly together on Tradepoint.

The Guardian Valentine Gift advertisement. This year the Guardian offers you the chance to send your Valentine a gift book and enclose your card within the same package for only £5.99. Pillow Books have long been a traditional gift exchanged between lovers.

Underside Pauline Springett. TO Tom Bower's Hampstead residence for the launch of the book 'Underside', which may become a collectors' item by the end of the week if the authorities clear the decks (and the bookshelves) for the "double jeopardy" trial of Kevin Maxwell.

Underside Pauline Springett. tary, Jean Baddeley, is apparently involved in producing a new book, 'Underside', which may become a collectors' item by the end of the week if the authorities clear the decks (and the bookshelves) for the "double jeopardy" trial of Kevin Maxwell.

Underside Pauline Springett. THE efforts of estate agents desperate to revive interest in the property market become ever more bizarre. Keith Cardale Groves is marketing a "stucco-fronted Regency house in Chester Row, Belgravia, SW1". This unfurnished des res is available for rent at £1,200-a-week. It may, suggests the press release, appeal to "those seeking literary inspiration" - for it is the childhood family home of poet and playwright, T S Eliot.

A new Motorola phone with change from one pound. TRUST CELLPHONES DIRECT TO LEAD THE WAY. THE FAMOUS MOTOROLA MICRO TAC DUO 'FLIP' PHONE FOR LESS THAN A POUND. PLUS FREE connection to the Vodafone LowCall Tariff, FREE in-car adaptor and FREE carrying case.

United Leasing and other advertisements on the right margin of the page.

Rugby League

United Leeds suffer split

Paul Fitzpatrick

LEEDS's football manager Hugh McGahan is worried about his players becoming involved in rugby all the year round after the "marriage" of the city's league and union clubs.

He will seek urgent talks with the rugby union club, who will play at Headingley from next season, to thrash out the problem.

On Tuesday Dennis Greenwood, the rugby league club's chairman, said there would be no objection to players switching to union in the winter. Indeed he welcomed it.

However, it would appear that he had not consulted either Leeds's football manager or coach before he aired his view.

McGahan said that Dean Bell, Leeds's coach, was far from happy at the prospect of his players turning out 52 weeks a year.

"All players need time to rest and to get over niggling injuries," said McGahan. "If players played rugby league in the summer and union in the winter they would have no time at all to recuperate and to build up for the following season. That would most certainly affect their form."

"Rugby league is regarded as the toughest contact sport in the world and it is going to be even tougher when Super League is launched in March. We are desperately keen to challenge the might of Wigan for the sport's major honours and we are not going to do

that if most of our players are tired because of playing rugby all the year round."

Maurice Lindsay, the Rugby Football League's chief executive, endorsed McGahan's view. "The RFL and the British Medical Association are concerned at the prospect of players playing 52 weeks of the year. We believe that the welfare of the players is paramount, and that surely cannot be helped by all-the-year-round rugby."

Meanwhile Mark Forster, the 31-year-old Warrington and former Great Britain winger, has been included in the Ireland squad for the Fijian tour next week. James Lowe, the Leeds hooker, and Bernard Dwyer, the Bradford Bulls hooker or back-row forward, are also in contention for places.

Highfield, who have been told to improve their performance or risk losing their place in the Second Division, have appointed Jim Crellin, 52, as manager. He is an experienced coach but has been out of the game for more than three years since leaving Leigh in 1992.

The club have also appointed Alex Melling, the 31-year-old former Swinton and Rochdale hooker, as player-coach. He is currently playing for the amateur club Oldham St Anne's. Tommy Frodsham, Highfield's player-manager during the Centenary season, will be invited to stay at the club.

Workington Town's fourth-round Challenge Cup tie with Widnes was postponed last night and will now be played on Sunday.

Athletics

Comeback run for Gunnell

SALLY GUNNELL returns to the track this weekend to run her first British race in nearly 18 months. The Olympic 400 metres hurdles champion has entered the two-day AAA Indoor Championships in Birmingham, where she joins a 400m field which includes the European Cup winner Melanie Neef.

It will be a surprise to see Gunnell, who last year spearheaded her old hurdles rival, Sandra Farmer-Patrick, women's team captain, who could not defend her world title in Gothenburg last year because of a hand injury which later needed surgery.

Gunnell, whose last domestic appearance was in the World Cup meeting at Crystal Palace in September 1994, will also run at the Ricoh Tour International in Birmingham on Saturday week, lining up against her old hurdles rival, Sandra Farmer-Patrick.

Sheikh Mohammed, obviously keen to build on this success, has recruited New Yorker Tom Albertini from his United States trainer Bill Mott to replace Jeremy Noe. Already making his presence felt in Dubai, Albertini is likely to prove a vital cog in the Godolphin set-up.

Everything points to another hugely successful campaign and from such a wide range of equine talent one or two new stars are sure to emerge.

Racing

Godolphin plan spring start

Ron Cox

ALTHOUGH still in the grip of winter, Newmarket takes a tentative step towards spring with the official opening of the Warren Hill grass gallop today.

It is a time of anticipation - perhaps for several local trainers, in addition as preparations get under way for the arrival of the Godolphin horses from Dubai.

Sheikh Mohammed's hand-picked team is again expected to operate from Motion Road, Cockle. Formerly an overflow yard used by John Gosden, it has undergone renovations during the winter.

Details of this year's Godolphin contingent have not yet been finalised, but I gather it will include more two-year-olds.

One three-year-old we could be hearing plenty about is Earth Shaker, who is a half-brother to Lammtarra.

He was highly regarded by Michael Stoute last year, but owing to niggling problems never ran. Hopefully, his spell in the Dubai sunshine will enable him to fulfil his potential.

Helicon, Mark Of Esteem, Don Michele, Mick's Love, Prickett and Shavanni, all two-year-old winners capable of big improvement with a little winter behind them, form the basis of another powerful Godolphin assault on the Classics.

A lot of top class jump racing will be decided before then, and yesterday Richard Dunwoody came to an important decision when opting to ride Flashing Steel rather



Back in his stride... Magic Johnson on his successful return for Los Angeles Lakers

Basketball

Magic conjures up his glorious past

Ian Katz on a night of hoop dreams for supporters in Los Angeles and Houston

ANYONE flicking an American television set for Tuesday night's NBA double-header could have been forgiven for wondering if they had been caught in a time warp.

From 6pm to 10.30 fans were treated to Michael Jordan's rampant Chicago Bulls taking on the Houston Rockets. For the next 2½ hours they could savour Magic Johnson's Lakers doing battle with Golden State. The glorious Sightings, all over again.

Never mind that the Bulls' victory over the reigning champions improved their record to 39 wins and only three defeats, equalling an NBA record for flying starts; it was always going to be Magic's night.

The permanently grinning former Lakers star, idolised by a generation of basketball fans, was back for his first game since retiring from the sport a year and a half ago after learning that he had contracted the HIV virus.

At 36, he was the oldest player on the court and the ninth oldest in the NBA. He was 27 lb heavier, several paces slower and a good deal jowlier than the old Magic. And instead of the glamorous point-guard position from which he led the Lakers to five NBA championships in the 1980s, he played up front with the big men.

But none of that mattered. American sports fans love nothing more than a comeback, and a good deal of them loved no one more than Earvin "Magic" Johnson. They used to call his games Showtime. The comeback was billed as The Lake Show.

For once Los Angeles's notoriously fair-weather fans filled the Great West Forum where Johnson's No. 32 vest hangs on the wall alongside those of Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Wilt Chamberlain. For once they were in their seats before tip-off.

"I don't expect a whole lot," a visibly nervous Johnson said before the game. "I just want to get into the game, smell the popcorn, get out there and hit somebody and then I'll know I'm back."

though, were somewhat higher. When Johnson checked into the game after a little more than two minutes' play they made a noise which has not been heard at the Forum for many years.

Though he missed his first basket attempt and looked exhausted after lumbering up and down the court a few times, Magic did not disappoint.

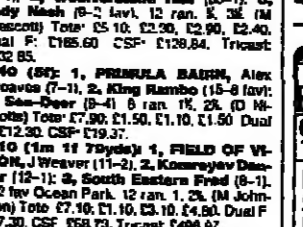
He scored his first basket with a trademark left-handed hook shot, dribbled the length of the court for a dunk, then wrong-footed Golden State's Latrell Sprewell with a dummy pass so sweet that the win-some-lose-some Lakers suddenly looked like championship contenders.

Johnson's first attempted comeback in 1992 was derailed when several players worried about the risk of contracting HIV on the court. The players are now more supportive as NBA officials have gone to some lengths to reassure them that the risk of infection is minuscule.

Warriors' rookie star Joe Smith was four years old when Johnson scored 42 points against the Philadelphia 76ers to clinch the championship in 1980. He had a poster of Magic on his wall. "I tried to do whatever he did," Johnson finished with 19 points, 10 assists, and eight rebounds - only two rebounds short of a coveted so-called "triple double" - in the Lakers' 10-point victory.

In Houston the other MJ, half a season into his own comeback, had a horrible night. He scored 23 points in the Bulls' 11-point win, a windfall for most players but a positive drought by the standards of his Airtress.

If more than a few basketball fans and TV executives suspected on Wednesday night that they had died and gone to heaven, tomorrow night's fixture that will stretch their credibility further. It features Jordan's Bulls against Magic's Lakers. Tickets are already going for \$1,000.



Raging Bull... Jordan's slam dunk attempt is blocked

Sedgefield runners and riders

Table listing horse racing results for Sedgefield, including race numbers, names, and winners.

Table listing horse racing results for other tracks, including race numbers, names, and winners.

Lingfield (All-weather Flat) with form

Table listing horse racing results for Lingfield All-weather Flat, including race numbers, names, and winners.

Table listing horse racing results for various tracks, including race numbers, names, and winners.

Soccer

Premiership: West Ham United 3, Coventry City 2

Dowie powers in as home banker

Martin Thorpe

THE increasingly cosmopolitan West Ham United finally proved there is no place like home last night when they ended a dismal run of four straight league defeats by beating their fellow relegation strugglers Coventry.

— but the £1.5 million Dumitrescu is due to make his debut on Saturday and the £1.6 million defender Billie is hoping to get a work permit in time to start against Spurs in a fortnight.

home side who broke the deadlock — Rieper. And, yes, it was grim for Ogrizovic. Under challenge from jumping West Ham players he dropped the ball from Hughes's corner allowing the Dane to hit home. The big goalkeeper pleaded he had been fouled but to no avail.

Check, mate... West Ham's Danny Williamson and Coventry's Marcus Hall do battle for the ball at Upton Park last night



Check, mate... West Ham's Danny Williamson and Coventry's Marcus Hall do battle for the ball at Upton Park last night

Nottingham Forest 2, Leeds United 1

Roy hits the right spot

David Hopps

NOTTINGHAM Forest's first-choice striking partnership, Bryan Roy and Kevin Campbell, has been one of the least successful aspects of another impressive season, but a goal apiece accounted for Leeds United at the City Ground last night as Forest stretched their unbeaten home record past the year mark.

loose ball against the foot of Beoney's left-hand post. Beoney was at full stretch to push Woon's 30-yard around the same post minutes later after Leeds' midfield allowed him an inviting amount of time to steady himself for the shot.

control allowed Beoney to save. Woon's looping header then struck the bar. Leeds needed a moment of fortune and they found it in Palmer's equaliser in the 53rd minute. As McAllister's corner fell to his feet four yards out, he suppressed his surprise long enough to poke the ball into the net.

Southampton 1, Manchester City 1

Ball rebounds with a point

Jeremy Alexander

ALAN BALL's past was caught by his present last night when Riepler rolled in a simple equaliser six minutes from time to deny Southampton the pleasure of victory through Shipperley's goal midway through the second half.

him "a special welcome" but the crowd's was delivered in boos and the game settled into a pattern of predictable movement, artless passing and easy interception.

sac and frustration eventually took his season's tally of cards to seven yellows on top of a red.

Bosman rebels face huge fine

Bosman rebels face huge fine

Russell Thomas

THE European Commission will today tell Uefa officials face to face that they can expect a heavy fine if they resist the landmark Bosman judgment any longer.

representatives to Geneva next Wednesday for a Uefa conference of three clubs from each of Uefa's leading 12 associations.

Ian Ross on Newcastle's puzzling Colombian connection

Asprilla doubts growing

CONFUSION reigned yesterday as the wheels began to fall off Faustino Asprilla's proposed £6.7 million transfer from Parma to Newcastle.

had demanded that Parma supply all the player's medical documents after it was revealed that he had not fully recovered from a serious knee injury five years ago.

dall has launched an audacious attempt to make Real Madrid's Danish international forward Michael Laudrup his latest signing for Sheffield United.

Results

Soccer FA CARLING PREMIERSHIP Aston Villa (H) 0 Liverpool (A) 2

SCOTTISH LEAGUE

First Division St Mirren (H) 0 Greenock Morton (A) 1

REPRESENTATIVE MATCHES

Civil Service 24, Royal Navy 40, Combined London 25, RAF 14, Commonwealth Edinburgh 11-15 v North/Midlands 16

Fixtures

(7.30 unless stated) Soccer FA TROPHY First-round replays

Ghana to go no further

A DOUBLE shock was served up by the African Nations' Cup yesterday when the favourites Ghana lost 3-0 in the semi-finals to South Africa



Rugby Union IB digs in over

Robert Armstrong

T

Board tight law on scrum

Rowell: En to win thar

Blyth puts the sting

Rugby Union

IB digs its heels in over transfers

Robert Armstrong on the case that will test the 180-day qualification rule

THE proposed moves of the Scottish international Gary Armstrong and Doddie Weir to Newcastle Gosforth were thrown into turmoil by a new International Board regulation on player movement announced yesterday.

Board tightens law on scrums

EIGHT-MAN scrums which remain bound until the ball is out will become compulsory next season under a new law approved by the International Board at this week's annual meeting in London, writes Robert Armstrong.

Rowell: England prefer to win than to entertain

THE England manager Jack Rowell yesterday offered praise for "the refreshing-looking Welsh team" announced on Tuesday but refused to give any commitment to an expensive 15-man game of the type Wales have promised to play.

Blyth puts the sting in England A's tail

ENGLAND A, who have beaten Western Samoa and France A in recent weeks, took another scalp at Leicester yesterday with a 24-22 win over New South Wales.

that the IB had taken the best legal advice on the matter. The immediate problem of whether Armstrong and Weir will be allowed to take part in Courage league matches for Newcastle Gosforth this season after moving from their Scottish clubs will be resolved only by a flexible interpretation of IB policy by the SRU.

The IB's ambiguous role as a policy-maker was highlighted by Pugh's admission that the world governing body was "not a policeman". He explained: "The game has gone professional overnight and rugby is a world asset that we have to protect. We put the regulations in place and we must expect each union to abide by them."

Meanwhile, Lions' tours and tours by national sides and tours endorsed by the IB as being "essential for the development of the game on a world-wide basis". The IB recommended that the length of tours might be reduced, with the unions given the flexibility to determine the number of games scheduled.



Lord of the flies... Townsend has talent still untapped

Townsend enjoying a roller-coaster ride

Ian Malin on the trainee banker hoping to check France's progress at Murrayfield

AT FLY-HALF there is nowhere to hide. As playmaker the No. 10 calls the shots but is also there to be shot at. And a sound defence also has to be part of his armoury.

ric acceleration, back rows have to watch him all the time, and his running skills give a break line so many options. And going to Northampton has improved his game. He has matured nicely under Ian McGeechan.

Yet Townsend, despite the ups and downs, has a keen sense of humour and is apparently without a care in the world. When you phone him at the Northampton home he shares with his fellow international Michael Dods, a Highland jig plays on the answerphone.

Sport in brief

Dope test pair allege restraint of trade

MATS WILANDER and Karel Novacek, who allegedly failed dope tests at last year's French Open, yesterday filed a writ in the High Court claiming that sections of the International Tennis Federation's rule 53, relating to appeals against positive drug tests, are a restraint of trade.

Peers fight for TV sport

A POWERFUL cross-party alliance of peers has tabled an amendment to the Broadcasting Bill to prevent satellite stations from gaining exclusive access to top sporting events.

Stern tests for Britain

BRITAIN'S men's and women's hockey teams will play against potential Olympic medalists in the Frc-Atlanta International Tournament in Milton Keynes from June 13-16.

Hutchison strikes again

PAUL HUTCHISON, Yorkshire's England Under-19 pace bowler, undermined Zimbabwe in the third and final Test in Bulawayo yesterday. He took six for 21 as Zimbabwe were dismissed for 143.

Muster hits top spot

THOMAS MUSTER of Austria will replace Andre Agassi as tennis world No. 1 when the ATP rankings are published on February 12. The American, who replaced Pete Sampras last week, is deprived of his position because the San Jose tournament is a week late this year and next week Agassi will lose the 206 points he gained for winning there in 1995.

Collins drops "spook"

STEVE COLLINS, the WBO super-middleweight champion, has dispensed with the services of the hypnotist Tony Quinn, who was given some of the credit for the Irishman's two defeats of Chris Eubank. Paul "Scrap Iron" Ryan, the British and Commonwealth light-welterweight champion from Hackney, will defend his WBO Intercontinental title against Antonio Strabello of Italy at the London Arena on Saturday week.

Snooker

Ebdon joins vanquished

Clive Everton

PETER EBDON yesterday joined the mighty to fall at the Royal Welsh Open in Newport. Tournament favourite after the elimination of Stephen Hendry and John Higgins on Tuesday, he promptly went out 5-3 to the 29-year-old Welshman Mark Williams in the quarter-finals.

Boxing

Lewis staying with the Duvas

Kevin Mitchell

LENNOX LEWIS'S manager Frank Maloney yesterday denied that the death this week of Dan Duva, the American promoter with whom he had worked closely, had led to the cancellation of the April contest between Lewis and Riddick Bowe.

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